

STORKS IN TREES

BY MARGARET MORSE NICE

It was my privilege to spend a day in early June in the Unterspreewald with the ornithologist who has made a notable study of the bird life of these woods and meadows.¹ We had taken an early train from Berlin to the village of Lubözl, fifty miles southeast; here many of the houses and barns were old and quaint; the women wore black peasant costumes handsomely embroidered, and every one greeted us kindly.

Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) were abundant in the village nesting in the barns, the jolly little Serin (*Serinus canarius serinus*) sang, and the Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) gave his absurd note. Soon we began to hear the lovely Sky-Larks (*Alauda arvensis*). Two years ago² I had been sorely disappointed in their song, but this time I rejoiced in it with my whole heart; it is altogether charming, brimming over with the delight of living. And then I heard my first Cuckoo (*Cuculus c. canorus*). The song is a melodious, peaceful, satisfying sound, and I do not wonder that it is loved.

The meadows were sweet with the scent of new-mown hay and fields were bright with pink ragged robin, while along the paths grew yellow irises and the bluest of forget-me-nots. I was delighted to hear the Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus c. collybita*) again; he also improved on acquaintance. All day we kept hearing his simple, earnest lay and it always pleased me. I am very fond of the handsome and confiding Yellowhammers (*Emberiza citrinella*) whose song cannot be mistaken. The gorgeous Golden Orioles (*Oriolus o. oriolus*) were heard time and again; the spirited song has much in common with that of our Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*). White-throats (*Sylvia communis*) were busily singing; one of their songs reminded me very much of that of our Bell's Vireo (*Vireo belli*), but others are more musical and less easy to remember.

A notable feature of wooded areas in Germany consists in the numbers of Raptores that nest in them. We saw five or six Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) during the day, a Red Kite (*Milvus m. milvus*), and three Black Kites (*Milvus m. migrans*), two of which were chasing the third and at the same time giving a curious trilling sound. We also observed a Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) in flight and a Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) in the woods.

¹Gottfried Schiermann, 1930. Studien über Siedlungsdichte im Brutgebiet. Journal für Ornithologie, 78, pp. 137-180.

²1933. Some Ornithological Experiences in Europe. Bird-Banding, 4, pp. 147-154.

A new and exciting bird to me was the Hoopoe (*Upupa erops*) with its extraordinary crest. We found a mossy *Spielnest* of a Wren (*Troglodytes t. troglodytes*) and saw several fat babies that had been raised nearby. Herr Schiermann was always examining bushes with his walking stick and the count of nests thus discovered was as follows: a Turtle Dove's (*Streptopelia turtur*), a Garden Warbler's (*Sylvia borin*), a Hooded Crow's (*Corvus cornix*), and eight nests of the pretty, tame Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) containing from one to six eggs, while one had also a Cuckoo's egg. There were also two empty nests of especial interest—that of a Screaming Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*) and the hollow tree where a Goosander (*Mergus m. merganser*) had raised her brood of young.

A flash of emerald—and a shining little Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis ispida*) darted up the Spree. A pair of Curlews (*Numenius arquata*) pursued a Buzzard, a Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) walked importantly along, and from a clump of weeds we heard the surprising medley of a Marsh Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*).

But the most exciting sight of the whole trip was the colony of White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) in a group of oaks. Although storks nest in trees quite commonly in many places in their range, almost always they do so in single pairs. Just why this typically solitary bird should become colonial in this place is a mystery. Several times during the day we had seen the handsome great birds walking unconcernedly about the meadows and we had passed two nests in trees in different places. But here there were fifteen nests in the tops of ancient oaks, two, three, and four in the same tree. A parent was on each nest and two to three white babies could be seen sitting stiffly erect. The nesting trees are surrounded by a wire fence and the colony is strictly protected. We sat down to watch and soon some storks came flying home. It was a wonderful sight to see the immense black and white birds sailing in the air. And most thrilling of all was the response of the mate on the nest—it threw its head way over on its back and gave the loudest kind of *Klappen* with its great beak. Herr Schiermann said, "You can imagine what it must be like when father, mother, and four babies 'clap' on your roof!"

Through the long twilight as we made our way back to the station we still heard the soft call of the Cuckoo and the happy singing of the Sky-Larks. It had been a wonderful day and we had a record of fifty-five birds.

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